

# **Some Thoughts on Byzantine Military Strategy**

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**The Hellenic Studies Lecture**

# **Some Thoughts on Byzantine Military Strategy**

**WALTER EMIL KAEGI, JR.**



**HELLENIC COLLEGE PRESS**  
**Brookline, Massachusetts 02146**  
**1983**

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Research, Lecture and Scholarship Fund

Published by Hellenic College Press  
50 Goddard Avenue  
Brookline, Massachusetts 02146

ISBN 0-916586-95-2 pbk

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Kaegi, Walter Emil.

Some thoughts on Byzantine military strategy.

(The Hellenic studies lecture)

Bibliography: p.

1. Strategy. 2. Tactics. 3. Byzantine Empire--

History, Military--527-1081. I. Title. II. Series.

U163.K24 1983 355.4'3'09495 84-494

ISBNB 0-916586-95-2 (pbk.)

## Some Thoughts on Byzantine Military Strategy

In the pre-nuclear age, and in particular before the nineteenth century, military strategists, historians, and presumably many diplomats devoted less interest to the accidental outbreak of war than to the role of accident and random factors affecting the course of a war in progress. Although those earlier strategists expressed confidence in the utility of studying the history of wars and military science—because they believed that such studies could assist one in achieving military success despite adverse quantitative odds, they always remained cautious about the unexpected turns that violent conflict could take, especially at moments of large-scale intensive combat. They accepted the use of military force, but they repeatedly warned against excessive confidence in one's ability to predict, to control, or to direct the course of a war once full-scale hostilities had commenced; they stressed the imponderables in war. They assumed that, of course, decision makers should try to know the military and political situation as fully and as accurately as possible but they should also realize that the unknown is a given in war and that somehow one should try to allow for it (without knowing its specific features or dimensions in the particular instance), or at least expect that it would be present, in any attempt to make estimates or to develop any plan of operations.

It would be erroneous to assume that, in the centuries that preceded the twentieth, there was an absence of awareness, within the leaderships of the sophisticated powers, of the risks of war. In fact, if one examines the record of warfare in some of those centuries, it is evident that there was little inclination to engage in what some modern scholars have called 'glorious' war. Throughout many earlier centuries there usually was a preference to exercise caution in carrying out military operations, and one of the specific reasons invoked by some of those contemporaries was the fear of the unknown, the random, the accidental, or other uncertainties of fortune in battle. That proclivity to caution prevailed among established kingdoms, republics, and empires until the Napoleonic Wars at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. This does not mean that there were no hotheads, but sophisticated treatises on war and sophisticated commanders usually displayed a reluctance to gamble everything in the pitched battle. In fact, they often received explicit instructions to that effect from their governments; the decisive battle held too many pitfalls, political and economic as well as military.

There was a prudent preference in avoiding resort to the maximum possible level of ferocity of violence within the existing levels of military technology, weaponry, and tactical skills and methodologies. It was repeatedly within the capabilities of victorious powers to exterminate the population of a defeated one, but the actual cases of adoption of such a policy are very limited—it tended not to be in the victorious power's interest. Political and military leaders were usually mindful of the difficulty of replacing losses among relatively expensive and difficult to recruit and difficult to train soldier-specialists in those eras of relatively small armies. The comparatively modern doctrine of the maximum concentration of force had not yet become universal and dominant strategic wisdom.

The absence of modern means of surveillance and rapid communications contributed much to the fog of war in the centuries that preceded the twentieth. But even in the slow-moving warfare of earlier centuries, it was often future expectations about war that determined efforts to limit the scope of and arrange the termination of war. Politics usually placed strong constraints on the choice and implementation of specific military operations in a war already in progress, even though matters did not always turn out as those who were establishing the constraints expected. Seldom did sophisticated powers wage wars of annihilation. There was no renunciation of the possible resort to armed force, but there was a reluctance to commit all of one's forces, especially in the initial engagements, until one had a feel for the resources, capabilities, and limitations of the opponent.

The recently published book of John Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, has brought the problem of combat back to the attention of many historians. Keegan, of course, made no attempt to refer to Byzantium, but he tends to avoid broader questions of strategy, generalship, and logistics, even though they largely shape the context in which his combatants encountered the face of battle.

Military history has been out of fashion for so long that it is necessary, in a time of historians' fascination with economic and socio-cultural aspects of history, to point out that at times the military dimension of historical reality has been important and even decisive; that military events have not always been merely the objective working out of social, economic and intellectual conditions and trends; that at least occasionally military decisions and actions, which, of course, are never entirely dissociated from other dimensions of historical reality, do exert their own influence on events and in the creation of realities. The study of battle and strategy

perience in the kind of warfare that later prevailed in Italy in the 540s. But there were much older precedents in Greek manuals of warfare from the Hellenistic and Roman periods, about which more will be said later. Instead of decisive combat, the norm was slow and crafty war of attrition, *Ermattungskrieg*, as Hans Delbrueck aptly described it, in contrast to *Niederwerfungskrieg*, war of annihilation.<sup>7</sup> Procopios identified Belisarios with the conduct of craftiness and attrition when he stated that the Ostrogothic King Totila “wanted to come to a straightforward decision by battle with them [the Byzantines] on a plain rather than to struggle by means of wiles and clever contrivances.”<sup>8</sup> Procopios explained elsewhere, “since men do not always take confidence in fortune, they do not enter straightforward into danger, even if they boast that they excel over the enemy in every respect, but by deceit and some contrivance they strive to go around their opponents. For there is danger for them in an even match, because there is uncertainty about the outcome.”<sup>9</sup> These words described the reality of warfare in the age of Justinian. It was a warfare of patience, timing, cleverness, and endless maneuvering. Glory and zeal in battle were not regarded as essential qualities for success in war, which was difficult and serious business. As Procopios coldly observed, “enthusiasm is advantageous and very praiseworthy, insofar as it is moderate and brings no harm to its possessors.”<sup>10</sup> Both Procopios and the anonymous strategist implied that although the outcome of a particular war or individual clash of arms might be probable, it was impossible to control all of the variables, hence the desirability for caution and prudence.

Another contemporary source on war, one that was written after Belisarios' campaigning in Italy, was an anonymous manual of strategy, entitled *Peri Strategikes* (“On Strategy”), which provides an account of warfare that is consistent with that of Procopios. The strategist emphasized defensive warfare, not conquest. His manual was permeated with the realization that there were situations in which the Byzantines might find themselves inferior to their opponents. He attempts to advise his readers on how to cope with an enemy who enjoys a superiority in numbers to one's own forces. He also praised other stratagems that avoided heavy casualties, for example, the wisdom of Belisarios in destroying the supplies of his enemies because they were thus compelled to disperse their own soldiers. The anonymous strategist recommended that, “If the enemy attacks and we are unable to respond,” the Byzantines should raise up other nations to force the enemy to call off his incursions. Implicit in his manual is confidence that intelligence can help to bring success in warfare despite an adverse numerical balance, yet also implicit is a recognition



that numbers are usually important in war, and especially for its eventual outcome; and that the Byzantine Empire was now entering a period in which it did not have satisfactory numbers of soldiers. Especially valuable is the manual's information about the effect of campaigning against the Ostrogoths in Italy (during the reign of Justinian I) and Byzantine strategic and tactical assumptions.<sup>11</sup>

The Justinianic reconquest of Italy is an example of a protracted war that became impossible to halt until the destruction of Byzantium's opponent. The expenses on the Byzantine and Ostrogothic sides were very large. The various diplomatic missions in search of a negotiated settlement all failed, because of Justinian's conviction of the rectitude and probability of success of his policies, in addition to his rather good intelligence on affairs in other areas of the known world. Superior political and military information gave the Byzantines a decisive advantage over the Germanic kingdoms of the Vandals and Ostrogoths. Attempts to end the military deadlock between the Byzantines and Ostrogoths also failed because each party had its own advantage in mind. As long as Justinian could believe that his soldiers were ultimately the victors, there was no possibility of a negotiated settlement.

The Byzantine victory over the Ostrogoths depended, in the long run, heavily on the Byzantine exploitation of the unknown. The Byzantines created too many uncertainties for the Ostrogoths to penetrate in the initial clashes. The Byzantines succeeded in exploiting some importantly perceived asymmetries in weaponry and fighting techniques between themselves and the Ostrogoths in Italy. Procopios explained that Belisarios succeeded in exploiting the absence of mobile horse archers among the Ostrogoths:

In private his friends asked . . . why he had been confident that he would overcome them [the Ostrogoths] decisively in the war. And he said that in engaging with them, at the first with only a few men, he had noticed just what was the difference between the two armies, so that if he should fight his battles with them in a force which was in strength proportionate to theirs, the multitudes of the enemy could inflict no injury upon the Romans [=Byzantines] by reasons of the smallness of their numbers. And the difference was this, that practically all the Romans [Byzantines] and their allies, the Huns, are good mounted bowmen, but not a man among the Goths has had practice in this branch, for their horsemen are accustomed to use only spears and swords, while their bowmen enter battle on foot and under the cover of heavy-armed men. So the horsemen, unless the engagement is at close quarters, have no means of defending themselves against op-



ponents who use the bow, and, therefore, can easily be reached by the arrows and destroyed; and as for the footsoldiers, they can never be strong enough to make sallies against men on horseback. It was for these reasons, Belisarios declared, that the barbarians had been defeated by the Romans [Byzantines] in these last engagements.<sup>12</sup>

The technique for waging a war of attrition and deception and ruses is explained in another major Byzantine strategic treatise which has survived, the *Strategikon* of Maurice, probably written between 580 and 635, even though there is controversy about the identity of the author. This treatise embodies Byzantine military wisdom and practice at the beginning of the seventh century and serves as the basis for all subsequent extant major Byzantine military writings, including the often cited *Taktika* of Emperor Leo VI, written ca. 900.<sup>13</sup>

The author of the *Strategikon* advises his readers to fashion craftiness and cunning in war and to avoid open battles, that it is often preferable to strike the enemy "by means of deceptions or raids or hunger" instead of open battle.<sup>14</sup> He warns against engaging the enemy in combat or showing them your own strength before you know their disposition of forces and their plans. He recommends the use of guile in war as efficacious. He calls attention to the disastrous example of the general who loses most of his army in one battle. There is great emphasis on caution in making war: "The suspicion-loving general is safe in war."<sup>15</sup> He advises against mixing allied barbarian forces (i.e., from various barbarian tribes, such as Germanic, Arab, Hunnic and other peoples) with Byzantine troops. Instead, they should be placed in their own camps, and assigned their own routes so that they cannot learn your deployment and strategy and then betray them to your enemy.<sup>16</sup> He cautions against using open warfare. The object of warfare is the defeat and disruption, not necessarily the slaughter, of the enemy. In fact, the author of the *Strategikon* counsels against using the technique of encirclement because it would encourage the enemy to remain and to risk battle. He advises that it is better to allow an encircled enemy to flee to avoid forcing him to take a life-or-death stand, which would be costly in casualties to the encircling party. There is no more eloquent testimony to the desire to avoid decisive battle.<sup>17</sup>

The author of the *Strategikon* recommends that the general should command his army "using tactics and strategy alertly."<sup>18</sup> He adds that, "By strategy, using opportunities and places, and by means of sudden undertakings in order to deceive the enemy, it is possible to reach one's goal without open battles."<sup>19</sup> In a major statement of his philosophy of warfare and the use of strategy, he states that, "Just as no ship can

sail the sea without a captain, so one cannot defeat the enemy without tactics and strategy, through which not only a strong mass of enemy can be beaten with God's help, but also a much larger number. Because wars will not be decided, as some uneducated men believe, through boldness and the number of men, but by God's favor, through tactics and strategy, about which it is more important to concern oneself than about the assembling of an inopportune mass, for the former brings safety and utility [effectiveness] while the latter brings defeat and harmful cost."<sup>20</sup>

Some other military wisdom from the *Strategikon* includes the following statements that reemphasize the author's stress on caution and prudence: "Wars resemble the hunt." Again, "The wise general learns as much as possible about his enemy and attacks at the weakest point." "Because open and frontal attack on the enemy, even with the belief in winning over him, causes the outcome of the affair to be dangerous and [results in] heavy losses. Whence it is typical for those who do not think to win a victory with heavy losses, which brings only empty fame."<sup>21</sup> The author advises that, "One must avoid letting the enemy know your tactical dispositions."

Other advice includes prudent and conservative reminders: "It is safe and useful to win over the enemy by good counsel and strategy instead of by brawn and force. For the one who brings a result without harm while the other brings it with losses."<sup>22</sup> "Courage and order can do more good than the mass of combatants, because often the situation of the land helps the weaker."<sup>23</sup> "What is advantageous to you is disadvantageous to the enemy, and what is helpful to him is what you should oppose."<sup>24</sup> "Not all peoples use the same tactics and strategy. One cannot lead an army with a single plan, but one must use experience, the nature of things, and make decisions according to the possibility of developments. There are many forms of attack."<sup>25</sup> These extracts suffice to give some impression of the sophisticated mentality of the author's approach to war, which he regards as far more complex than the employment of sheer power.

One of the most obvious characteristics of the Byzantine Empire was her long duration for which historians list many causes, such as the effectiveness of her bureaucracy and other institutions, the soundness of her coinage, and the astuteness of her diplomacy. I have become increasingly convinced, as a military historian, that her prevailing commitment to a military policy of generally avoiding decisive battle also contributed substantially to her long life as an empire. By that I do not mean merely her readiness to resort to diplomatic and financial devices of great variety to solve military threats. These were important

but they have been extensively described and analyzed in many broad and specialized publications. Instead, I am referring to the tendency to avoid, in much of the empire's history, risking everything in one decisive battle. Byzantium's leadership was not always able to avoid battle—the years 1071, 1176, 1204, and 1453 witnessed battles that were decisive for Byzantine history. Yet long periods elapsed without decisive battle.

Drs. Ralph-Johannes Lilie and John Haldon have discussed, in recent publications, the general characteristics of the Byzantine strategy in the seventh and eighth centuries, especially after Byzantium's loss of Palestine, Syria, and Egypt to the Arabs. They both rightly call attention to what they note as the basic avoidance of battle on the part of the Byzantines in their defense of the remaining Byzantine territories in Asia Minor against the Arabs, and they see in these efforts to create strongholds, close off mountain passes, an anticipation of the famous and better documented Byzantine tactics against Arab raiders of the ninth and tenth centuries. They are correct to point out these continuities.<sup>26</sup> Of course, there were many reasons for the Byzantines following such a passive strategy after their crushing defeats at the hands of the Arabs in the 630s and early 640s, including the small size and shattered morale and cohesiveness of the remaining Byzantine manpower. It was dangerous to risk one more time what little remained of it.

It is evident from reading the *Strategikon* of Maurice that by A.D. 600 Byzantium had developed strategic and tactical doctrines out of her Graeco-Roman heritage of military writings and from her military experiences in the sixth-century wars against the Vandals, Ostrogoths, and Persians. Techniques and military assumptions that were in use by A.D. 600 remained, with modifications to suit new ethnic foes, until and beyond Byzantium's collapse against the Seljuk Turks in the eleventh century. A critical element was a readiness to exploit uncertainties while minimizing one's own casualties, preferring a combination of artifices, diplomacy, delay, dissimulation, sowing dissension, corruption, and above all, employing caution and the indirect approach to warfare, in an effort to reduce risk and gambling to a minimum in warfare. The greatest weakness of these techniques of ruses, deception, clever stratagems, and commitment to war of slow attrition was the development of excessive overconfidence and intellectualism in military operations. The result was an underestimation of basic underlying forces, such as the role of numbers, in the outcome of war.

Byzantine strategic thought did not emerge *ex nihilo*. It was a continuation, often a conscious imitation and adaptation of formal Greek strategical writings that stretched as far back as Aeneas Tacticus, if not

earlier, and of works on strategy and stratagems written by Greeks in the Roman period or by Romans who adapted and translated and paraphrased Greek strategic writings, for the most part. These well-known facts create many problems for anyone attempting to evaluate the content, originality, value, and accuracy of Byzantine strategic writings. The question is: How much derives not from the Byzantine period but from the writers of much earlier centuries—a problem which is common in the interpretation of Byzantine texts, which Professor C. Mango pointed out so well in his Inaugural Lecture on “Byzantine Literature as a Distorting Mirror”?

The Greek strategists, in particular Aeneas Tacticus, Asklepiodotos, Onasander, Arrian, and Aelian, were not distinguished by their intellectual brilliance; as military thinkers they were greatly inferior to the Greek generals of antiquity. They have, however, left a record of formations, stratagems, maxims, and injunctions which they did not, for the most part, invent, but were compiling, organizing and recording for their readers. Yet their corpus of strategic writings provided for Byzantine strategists many things: not merely the format and subjects for the education of a general, and not merely antiquarian descriptions of hoplites and phalanxes, which had become anachronistic long before the Byzantine Empire (yet note the remarks of Dr. Everett Wheeler about the possible usefulness of the phalanx in the Flavian period).<sup>27</sup> What they provided were some basic ways of thinking about war, including the elementary ones of order, discipline, and the creation of commonly understood verbal commands for movements or evolutions in combat. Their emphasis on these largely explains the Byzantine generals' and strategists' attentiveness to these problems. Devotion to strict order and discipline was a distinctive feature of Byzantine armies in the Middle Byzantine Period, as is evident from a reading of Byzantine strategic writings. But some of what critics regard as the most distinctive features of Byzantine warfare and strategy, the indirect approach, as Sir Basil Liddell-Hart expressed it, or Sir Charles Oman in his *History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages*, or what Drs. Lilie and Haldon perceive, correctly, in Byzantine defensive policies in Asia Minor in the late seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries—avoidance of battle, warfare of slow attrition, initial passive resistance to invaders of the countryside, followed by a tactic of seeking to cut off and destroy the invaders piecemeal—find their anticipation in some of the early Greek strategists and their extant works.

Consider, for example, this following passage:

Often, a general, on hearing that the enemy are but a day's march distant, will call out his troops and lead them forward, hurrying to come to close quarters with the enemy, who, purposely retreating, do not make a stand against him; and so he assumes that they are afraid and pursues them. This continues until they come into a broken country, surrounded by mountains on all sides, and the general, unsuspecting, still attacks them; next, as he marches against their positions, he is cut off by the enemy from the road by which he led his army in. They seize the passes in front of him, and all the heights round about, and thus confine their enemies in a sort of cage. But the general is carried away by his impetuosity, in the belief that he is pursuing a fleeing enemy, without noticing who is approaching: and later, on looking before and behind and on both sides, and seeing all the hillsides full of the enemy, he and his army will be destroyed by javelins, or unable to fight and unwilling to surrender, he will cause all to die of hunger, or by surrender enable the enemy to dictate whatever terms they wish. Therefore, retreats on the part of the enemy should be suspected and not stupidly followed; the general should observe the country rather than the enemy, and notice through what sort of terrain he is leading his forces; and he should either refrain from advancing and turn aside from the route, or if he does advance, he should take precautions, leaving forces to hold the mountain passes and connecting defiles. . .<sup>28</sup>

This is not a Byzantine text on Byzantine-Arab warfare of the tenth century in Anatolia, and it is not (as the word javelins indicates) from any other Byzantine strategic manual of the Middle Byzantine Period. It is from Onasander, a Greek strategist, who wrote in the first century A.D., but was widely recopied and was presumably read by would-be strategists in the Middle Byzantine Period.

The evidence for the debt of Byzantine strategists to earlier Greek strategists can be demonstrated by other copious parallels in extant texts, well documented by some of the editors of these texts, and by the explicit reference in such authors as John Lydos in the middle of the sixth century, who includes in his list of strategists such authors as Aelian, Arrian, Aeneas, and Onasander. But the Byzantine strategists' debt to which I refer is the counsel to seek to avoid the risks of battle except under the most favorable circumstances, and to use every conceivable nonmilitary device to improve the likelihood of accomplishing one's purposes with the minimum of losses. Therefore, the crafty



techniques that Crusaders later hated and despised and which some modern Byzantinists and twentieth-century military experts, including Basil Liddell-Hart and Herman Kahn, extol in Byzantine attitudes to the practices of warfare, did not suddenly appear in the seventh, ninth, or tenth centuries. The corpus of Greek strategic literature, in addition to its inclusion of detailed discussion of how to wage battle successfully, also included a group of instructions about how to avoid battle and how to maximize military gains with a minimum of fighting. These counsels, including how to sow dissension among one's enemies, the role of treachery and plots and factional alignments in creating decisive turns or opportunities for military success, were a continuity; an inheritance from the Greek strategists of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. They represent a genuine strand of continuity of Hellenic thought and tradition in the Byzantine thought-world. As the Byzantine Empire's external military crisis and manpower crisis intensified in the late sixth and seventh centuries, it was natural for men to look for military advice to the often very outdated existing manuals of strategy, stratagems, and tactics that had proven successful long before. Thus the extensive resort to craft, cunning, and indirect warfare, with the aim of winning without risking much decisive bloody combat, typified in the Italian campaigns of Belisarios, in much of the wisdom of the anonymous strategists of the sixth century, and the *Strategikon* of Maurice, is not an anachronistic return by an adaptation of very old Greek strategists' counsel about avoiding pitched battle to the austere realities of the sixth and early seventh centuries. Such was essential to the very frame of reference of strategists when compilers and generals consulted them in the sixth and seventh centuries in the search for solutions to the empire's dilemmas. The continuity in Hellenic strategic thinking was not merely in its specific borrowings of injunctions and details of maneuvers, but in attitudes of caution, prudence, cunning, and awareness of one's own limitations and of the possibility of risk and the random role of accidents in decisive combat; in short, in ways of thinking about waging war.

It is incorrect, while stressing the neglected Byzantine debt to earlier Greek military literature for the proclivity to or inspiration for warfare of delay, stratagems, and craft, to depreciate the distinctiveness of Byzantine strategies and tactics, especially those that scholars discern in the middle of the seventh century and later. But there has been neglect of earlier Greek strategic thought's contribution to and continuity with Byzantine military thought. After all, Clausewitz noted, in *Vom Kriege*, that principles of war are simple, that what is difficult is their

implementation. The general ideas about how to wage effective warfare while minimizing risks and casualties through mastery of timing and craft and subversion and indirect attack were already available in the extant corpus of strategic writings. The challenge for the Byzantines in the military crises and conditions of diminished material and human resources of the seventh century and later was to adapt those precedents and principles to specific new conditions in a world with some changing military technologies.

The conviction that there was utility in using the mind to devise cunning stratagems, ruses, and techniques of war to wage war effectively yet cheaply was a two-edged inheritance from antiquity. It encouraged an admirable proclivity to use one's head in thinking about war, yet it also many times created a dangerous even disastrous overconfidence in the ability of the strategist to offset, through cleverness, quantitatively and perhaps also qualitatively superior material and human resources and power.

It is probable that the longevity of the Byzantine Empire owes very much to its adoption of a cautious military strategy that avoided bloody and risky pitched battles. Such battles did occur, but the tendency and prevailing policy was to try to avoid them. Byzantium missed many opportunities because of the adoption of this cautious military strategy. Yet her resources of manpower and materials were finite and the parsimonious and calculating employment of them in the late sixth through most of the eleventh centuries helped to reduce the chances of some gamble resulting in a total military catastrophe or the dissolution of the empire. Risk minimization had its rewards; Byzantium assumed that the unknown exerted great effects upon the course and outcome of war. Therefore, she strove, even in an era of low lethality of weapons, for a multifaceted defensive strategy that did not rely exclusively on military force, but also on diplomacy, prudence, superior use of intelligence, and the exploitation of the enemy's weaknesses.

Several distinctive features of strategy in the modern world are absent from Byzantine strategic texts and from Byzantine historians' description of strategy and tactics. The early modern appreciation of the need for the general ideally to possess the coup d'oeil, the ability to discern at a glance the principal strategic features of a situation or piece of land—heavily emphasized in military literature between the middle of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—is missing. Similarly, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' emphasis—ever since the campaigns of Napoleon—on the principle of concentration of force, is not evident. Byzantine strategists would not necessarily have



disagreed, I think, with it in principle, but would not have given it the emphasis that it received between 1800 and 1945. In part, because of the slowness of communications and other logistical difficulties, the military texts and narratives do not justify any effort to impute a "grand strategy," or rigorous comprehensive or total strategy for all frontiers of the empire; the lack of anything resembling a Joint Chiefs of Staff or General Staff reinforced that absence. The closest approach to any grand strategy would be the broader world view of Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos in his *De Administrando Imperio*, in which there is an interlocking diplomatic and military perspective. Byzantine manuals of strategy and tactics assume a general who is responsible in a specific local situation, and who may often be cut off from contact with the capital and the emperor and who, therefore, must be expected to possess wide authority and initiative in waging war. Finally, such concepts as center of gravity, emphasized by Clausewitz, or the American one of escalation, are not present in Byzantine strategic works.

However limited these Byzantine manuals on strategy and tactics may appear to be, they have no real counterpart, to my knowledge, in medieval western Europe, where it appears that translations of the Late Roman military writer Vegetius, virtually unchanged, are the only extant formal studies of principles of warfare. One possible explanation (suggested to me by my colleague, Professor Peter Dembowski, who is a specialist on Old French literature), is that it was contrary to the prevailing values of medieval western European warriors to engage in the intellectual study of warfare. If such is the case, the Byzantine adaptation and continuation of Graeco-Roman reflections on warfare are unique. It is not surprising that in the sixteenth century various Byzantine strategic manuals such as the *Taktika* of Leo VI served as important models for the efforts of Maurice and Johann of Nassau to reorganize military tactics, formations, commands, and drills. (On this see, especially the important researches of Werner Hahlweg and Michael Roberts.) It is true that during the Renaissance there was a rediscovery of the *Ars Militaris* of Roman authors, but it is the Byzantines who preserved and adopted the ancient Greek concepts of military or strategic science as *episteme* and *strategike*.

These cases illustrate some of the difficulties which are inherent in the study of Byzantine military institutions and strategy. An appreciation of very long-range continuities is essential. Lacunae in the extant sources do not always permit one to understand the full linkage and degree of continuity. The longer and broader historical context requires comprehension. It has always been known that there are many contin-

uities of Byzantium with her Greek and Roman antecedents, but in the case of strategy, especially on Byzantium's eastern frontier, there are some greater instances of continuity than hitherto suspected. The study of Byzantine strategy, conception of military operations, stratagems, and tactics is far from complete. Its realization will depend not only on progress in Byzantine military studies, but also a more accurate understanding of Greek and Roman military thought, that indispensable fount of Byzantine military wisdom. None of these remarks intend to denigrate the distinctive Byzantine contribution to strategic and tactical thinking, but that originality cannot be grasped without reference to its Greek and Roman heritage.

## NOTES

1. *Corpus Juris Civilis*, pr.
2. *Des Byzantiner Anonymus Kriegswissenschaft* 4.2 (In *Griechische Kriegsschriftsteller*, ed. H. Koechly and W. Rustow, Leipzig, 1855, 2:56). See also 6.4-6.5, 33.7-8 (58-60, 162-164 Koechly-Rustow).
3. Procopios. *Bella* 1.24.26, 2.16.7.
4. Ibid. 6.30.18.
5. Ibid 1.1.16-1.1.15.
6. Ibid. 3.15.25.
7. Hans Delbrueck, *Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte* (Berlin 1900) 2:399-401.
8. Procopios. *Bella* 7.8.11.
9. Ibid. 1.17.32.
10. Ibid. 6.23.29.
11. *Byz. Anon. Kriegswissenschaft* 33.7-8 (162-164 Koechly and Rustow). See. A. Pertusi, "Ordinamenti militari, guerre in Occidente e teorie de guerra dei Bizantini (secc. 6-10), *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo*, vol. 15, T.2 (Spoleto 1968) 631-700.
12. Procopios, *Bella* 6.27. 25-29.
13. The standard edition, henceforth cited as *Strategikon*, is *Das Strategikon des Maurikios*, ed. George T. Dennis and German trans. E. Gamillscheg (Vienna, 1981), and the Dennis English trans. published by University of Pennsylvania Press.
14. *Strategikon* 8.2.4.
15. Ibid. 8.2.47.16.
16. Ibid. 8.2.80.
17. Ibid. 8.2.92.
18. Ibid. pr.

19. Ibid. 2.1.
20. Ibid. 7A, pr.
21. Ibid. 7A, pr.
22. Ibid. 8.1.7.
23. Ibid. 8.2.8. 24.
24. Ibid. 82.81.
25. Ibid. 11, pr.
26. Ralph-Johannes Lilie, *Die byzantinische Realtion auf die Ausbreitung der Araber* (Munich, 1976). John Haldon and Hugh Kennedy, "The Arab-Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries," *Zbornik Radova, Srpska Akademija Nauka i Umetnosti, Vizantološki Institut* 19 (1980) 79-116.
27. Everett Lynn Wheeler, "Flavius Arrianus: A Political and Military Biography," Ph.D. diss. Duke Univ., 1977.
28. Onasander 11.3.4 (trans. by Illinois Greek Club in: *Aeneas Tacticus, Asclepiodotus, Onasander*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, 1923, 1962, 431-433).

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WALTER EMIL KAEGI, JR. is Professor of Byzantine History at the University of Chicago. He received his A. B. from Haverford College, and his A. M. and Ph. D. degrees from Harvard. He has had research grants from the American Numismatic Society, the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Philosophical Society, and the University of Chicago. In 1979 he was a Fellow of the American Research Center in Cairo, Egypt and in 1979 Fellow of Dumbarton Oaks. He is the author of *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome* (1968); *Byzantine Military Unrest, 471-843: An Interpretation* (1981); and *Army, Society, and Religion in Byzantium* (1983). He has had numerous articles published in various periodicals and academic journals.